

I. Introduction

The resources required by county Child Welfare Services (CWS) to provide services to abused and neglected children in California are considerable. Each month caseworkers investigate some 40 thousand reports of maltreatment. Roughly 60 thousand family members receive services designed to improve the capacity of families to safely care for their children. Of over 100 thousand children in foster care, California is responsible for almost 75 thousand children who are in a long term permanent placement. In addition to these basic services, caseworkers and other staff provide a range of services needed to prevent the need for more intensive care and to work with others at the community level and between counties to insure that the needs of children and families are met.

California's current method for allocating basic Child Welfare Services (CWS) resources is based on caseload standards and average monthly case counts. This leads to estimates of the workers or Full Time Equivalent (FTE) required to provide the basic child welfare services. The method provides both the total budget of the basic program statewide and the allocation of this budget across counties which are responsible for administering the program. In the 15 years since the current model was adopted, there have been numerous legislative, demographic, programmatic, and administrative and/or technical changes affecting the practice of CWS that necessitate a review of this process. Passage of Senate Bill (SB) 2030 required that the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) undertake an evaluation of workload and budgeting methodologies and set forth certain requirements for such a study. This report summarizes the findings of the evaluation and provides recommendations for CDSS based on work carried out between June 15, 1999, and January 1, 2000.

To accomplish the mandate to evaluate workload and the budgeting methodology, it was necessary to obtain information across a large and diverse social service delivery system throughout the state. State-level statutes and policies were reviewed as an underpinning to the study, along with key federal-level documents and policies. Candidate state-of-the-art practices were identified and prioritized for further study, existing alternative budgeting methods were considered, and other new and innovative service programs were assessed.

The SB 2030 legislation also established the statewide advisory group consisting of caseworkers, administrators, and other stakeholders. Broad representation from within CDSS and the county agencies was mandated. The role of the advisory group was to help refine expectations, review proposals and help select the contractor, provide guidance and assistance to the SB 2030 Project Team, and review the study results and recommendations in this report. A list of advisory group members can be found in Appendix 10.

A major aspect of the evaluation was the conduct of a technical workload measurement process and analysis. To carry out this process and to ensure fair representation of the diversity in county size and configuration, it was decided to study all CWS staff across all counties statewide. Data collection was initiated on September 7 and concluded on October 17. This required a major technical effort to develop a workload study data collection process utilizing the Child Welfare Service/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) network including data collection applications, network distribution, and data retrieval. Over 500 staff were trained and over 500 requests for technical assistance during the workload study were responded to. All 58 counties participated with over 15,000 staff supplying workload study data for a 2-week period. With considerable support from the counties, CDSS, Health and Human Services Data Center (HHSDC), and IBM, the project was able to keep to this highly challenging schedule. The data were subjected to quality assessment checks at several levels, and key benchmarks in the data results were achieved that indicated that the data analyses were accurate. The resulting data were used to address special studies of innovative programs and to develop minimum and optimum standards for workload.

Finally, a recommended budgetary model was developed based on the existing Proposed County Administrative Budget (PCAB) methodology, updated to reflect the results of the evaluation process. The model addresses current time requirements, recommended minimum and optimum standards, and differential staff turnover conditions experienced at the county level.

All this was accomplished within six months, resulting in recommendations on the adequacy of current budget practices, caseloads, staff development, supportive services, and preventative services. The scope of these activities, plus the short time frame, made this an extremely difficult project. The time limitations also prevented the project from analyzing the full range of

issues that could be addressed by the existing data and that may bear upon the range of innovative and collaborative programs. The diverse nature of programs and approaches that benefit California's children and families require further study in order to develop a clearer understanding of how best to identify the overall resources needed by this vulnerable population. While an important set of goals has been achieved by this evaluation, it represents only the first step in what is an ongoing process.

II. Study Goals and Objectives

The three goals pertaining to the scope of the SB 2030 evaluation are stated below in order of priority:

1. To understand the routine activities of child welfare staff¹ in fulfilling their duties;
2. To understand the time needed to complete all mandated practice activities; and
3. To estimate the time required to engage in child welfare practice that can be considered best practice or state-of-the-art (as referenced in the SB 2030 legislation) (California Department of Human Services, Request for Proposal (RFP) 99-03, p.4).

In addition to these goals, the SB 2030 legislation added a fourth goal area.

4. To review the budgetary methodology for statewide Child Welfare Services and for county-level allocations.

To address these goals the following study objectives were developed:

Goal Area 1: To understand the routine activities of child welfare workers and clerical staff in fulfilling their duties.

This goal area entailed the process of defining the scope of work measurement data gathering needed and the collection and analysis of the data. Specific objectives were as follows:

Utilize a consensus process statewide to develop a set of work measurement objectives that address case (child and family) specific and non-case activities.

Insure that activities can be classified into recognized CWS programs, units of service, and tasks.

Using the measurement objective, design and develop a statewide workload measurement data collection system in consultation with CWS/CMS.

Implement statewide data collection including scheduling, training, and technical support.

Retrieve all data, assess the quality, and incorporate corrections.

Analyze workload data and develop findings.

¹ Clerical and administrative functions were not a focus of the study results and recommendations per se, but are addressed by the recommended budgetary approach.

Goal Area 2: To understand the time needed to complete all mandated practice activities.

This goal was addressed through the review of relevant statutes and policies, and by obtaining information directly from casework, supervisory, and support staff throughout the state. The scope of the review was the basic CWS services. Objectives included the following:

Obtain and review state law and policy along with selected county policies and identify mandates that have implications for workload.

Review conditions that have recently impacted casework such as the CWS/CMS that have implications for workload.

Obtain feedback from casework, supervisory, and support staff regarding the degree to which mandates are routinely accomplished.

With the support of the law, policy, and workload data, obtain feedback from casework, supervisory, and support staff concerning the amount of time that would be needed to meet mandated requirements and to provide high quality services.

Develop recommended workload standards for the basic Child Welfare Services.

Goal Area 3: To estimate the time required to engage in child welfare practice that can be considered best practice or state-of-the-art.

This goal was addressed by obtaining statewide feedback concerning the identification of best practice or state-of-the-art initiatives and obtaining information leading to the development of measurement objectives for workload. This resulted in the identification of 10 special study areas. Objectives for this area were:

Identify candidate areas to consider as best practice or state-of-the-art presently implemented or being tested in California.

Obtain statewide feedback regarding which areas to prioritize for further study.

Obtain and review relevant law and policy and other documentation of these areas.

Carry out data-gathering efforts involving practitioners in these areas to clarify and define the initiative for further work measurement studies.

Provide recommendations for further study of these best practice or state-of-the-art areas.

Goal Area 4: To review the budgetary methodology for statewide Child Welfare Services and for county-level allocations.

This required a review of the existing CWS budget development methods and especially the PCAB process. Sources of information included staff and documentation from the CDSS Financial Branch and their county counterparts. Objectives included the following:

Interview involved CDSS Financial Branch staff and review the documentation used to develop the CWS budget including both “Basic” and premise components.

Obtain feedback from the county budget managers regarding the CWS budget and allocation methods.

Analyze the PCAB methodology and evaluate how the results from the work measurement and workload standard-setting process can best be integrated into the existing methodology.

Review alternative budget methodologies and consider their appropriateness for CWS budget development.

Integrate the workload measurement and standards into a budgetary model and project the financial impact of alternative standards.

Develop recommendations for future budget methodology.

The next two sections of this report provide a description of the study methodology and the results of the evaluation. Study recommendations and suggestions for approaches to conducting future studies are found in the final two sections.

